

“But I Might Need It Someday” and other excuses to hang on to stuff

I’m ready for spring. Spring cleaning? Not so much.

This annual ritual comes with a mixture of dread and delight. We dread starting it, and delight at the clean, pristine surfaces afterward. It’s not easy to keep horizontal surfaces free and clear of clutter. I have one chair that’s not really for sitting; it’s a temporary place to drop things for a minute. Or longer.

Clutter disturbs our peace, weighs us down and makes us feel grumpy, which in turn affects our relationships. You can’t fool yourself by stuffing it all in the closet. It’s one case where out of sight is *not* out of mind.

Lack of organization costs us precious time. Too often, I’ve been ready to leave for an appointment but have to dash upstairs for my shoes. Do you have to go through a stack of DVDs or CDs (minus their cases) before enjoying music or a movie? If you still search high and low for your car keys every other day, it’s time to organize. Of course we have endless excuses for avoiding cleaning up and clearing out. Here are just a few.

“It’s too valuable to let go. It’s worth a lot.”

If the possessions are indeed of high value, why are they out of sight in a box? Take the photo of your dad in uniform and his treasured pocket knife out of that box in the garage and display them on a shelf in your den. Give the remaining souvenirs to family members. Sentimental value is sweet, but if you have ten boxes more than you have room for, it’s time to send them on a sentimental journey—to the local charity, where someone else can enjoy them. What about the china Memère gave you 30 years ago? If it’s been hidden all that time, consider keeping just one beautiful tea cup and saucer in view as a reminder of her gentle and generous ways.

I bet you have suits you haven’t worn in ten years or more. Or a high-end mixer you never use. Just because they cost a fortune is no excuse to keep them.

“I might need it someday”

Erma Bombeck said, “Thanks to my mother, not a single cardboard box has found its way back into society. We receive gifts in boxes from stores that went out of business twenty years ago.” Sound familiar? We save far too many things, “just in case.” Start by ridding yourself of the bulky items, like the recliner in the family room that wobbles, and the table you bought with plans of refinishing. If you think you’ll get back to an article in that stack of magazines, you’re kidding yourself. And hopefully by now, you know that a collection of National Geographics magazines is neither rare nor desirable.

“It’s not mine.”

Bruce Williams, financial advisor on the radio during the 80’s had a brilliant plan for making an attic full of boxes disappear. He stuffed \$50 bills among the books and contents of the boxes belonging to his grown children. The reward was tantalizing enough for them to take action. If you’ve been providing storage for your brother Bill since he moved back to Maine five years ago, it’s time to

(very kindly) set a reasonable deadline and if he doesn't show, haul it to the dump (excuse me, the *transfer station*).

"It's not a problem; it just bothers my wife" It's true that one person's junk is another's treasure. I consider most of what my dear husband saves junk, while my things, of course, are treasures; we can laugh about it. If someone you care about fails to see that the sheer volume of their possessions is interfering with their life, you should contact a professional with an expertise in hoarding.

The word is used lightly and often in jest, but it's no joke for those who struggle with hoarding. The person finds it impossible to organize and arrange items as a true collection and your attempt to help will create undue stress for both of you.

You have options

If you'd rather pick rocks than tackle spring cleaning, cheer up. My friend Dot avoids the chore by doing just one room each month. You might hire a cleaning company like Merry Maids. For organizing or downsizing your home, hire a professional organizer to help, at least until you have a plan that you can follow through with.

Vow to make your home a comfortable and peaceful retreat from the worries of the world. Keep only those things that serve a functional purpose and that are beautiful and that make you happy.

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